



# Western Hemisphere Migratory Bird Conference

The need for countries to work together on a regional level has increased in the last century, as threats to wildlife populations have become more complex, with greater impacts occurring over broader geographic scales. As a result, modern threats to biodiversity in the Western Hemisphere present challenges that can only be addressed effectively by the strategic cooperation of wildlife conservationists and managers throughout North America, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Western Hemisphere leaders acknowledged this during the Summit of the Americas in 2001. These leaders made a commitment to “advance hemispheric conservation of plants, animals and ecosystems through...the development of a hemispheric strategy to support the conservation of migratory wildlife throughout the Americas.”

In keeping with the Summit commitment, the Western Hemisphere Migratory Bird Conference was convened to address the need for wildlife conservation on a hemispheric level. On October 6-8, 2003, representatives from 25 countries in the Western Hemisphere came together in Termas de Puyehue, Chile, to participate in the Conference. The event was co-hosted by the United States Department of State and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

This was the first time in more than four decades that representatives of the fish and wildlife agencies throughout the hemisphere met to discuss issues of mutual concern. Country representatives were joined by over 40

international wildlife conservation groups and stakeholder representatives who observed and participated in the Conference.

The purpose of the Conference was to develop cooperative strategies for conservation of migratory species and to promote broader collaboration on wildlife conservation activities among the countries of the Western Hemisphere. Meeting products included: (1) A prioritized list of conservation issues needing international collaboration; (2) An emerging matrix of tools available from non-government organizations, international conventions, and government bodies to address identified needs; and (3) An interim committee for follow-up.

The elected Interim Steering Committee is comprised of representatives from governments from various regions of the Hemisphere, the non-governmental conservation community, and interested international conventions. The Committee is charged with following-up on ideas developed at the Conference, producing reports on the status of conservation priorities and tools identified at the Conference, raising funds for future meetings, expanding representation for future actions, and developing a mechanism for establishment of a permanent body to address Western Hemisphere wildlife conservation priority issues.

This meeting demonstrated an understanding that wildlife conservation can only be effectively achieved by collaborating beyond traditional

geographic and political borders, and introduced a new willingness to look at conservation of all migratory species and common wildlife conservation issues within the Western Hemisphere.

Further, the Conference was visionary in developing new approaches to collaboration that maximize on-the-ground initiatives, minimize bureaucratic structure, and promotes synergies among various political levels including governments, non-governmental organizations, and international conventions. The Western Hemisphere Migratory Bird Conference and its follow-up actions offer important, new steps in finding collaborative answers to the complex wildlife conservation problems facing the world today—on a local, regional, hemispheric, and ultimately, global scale.

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